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INCENSE AND POISON ORDEALS IN THE
ANCIENT ORIENT

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The topics named above are connected by the facts of savage humanity's inevitable empiricism and manifold experiences. Twenty years ago, in re-examining Robertson Smith's work, I finally parted company with him at the assertion that incense "appears to have owed its virtue to the idea that it was the blood of an animate and divine plant."¹ It illustrates the extremes to which one can go under the influence of a theory that blood can explain everything in liturgy. What is a divine plant? Why is it viewed as such? Why count it animate? All objects may be believed to have guardian or resident spirits, but does that prove them to be considered animate? Is a stone, an amulet, a powerful fetish, considered to have blood? If not, has any tree or plant blood, unless it has red juice, like the shrub on the grave of Virgil's Polydorus? When speculations concerning the liturgical uses of blood go such fantastic lengths, it is certain that the speculator will find in casual incidents a host of marvelous meanings that ancient savages never dreamed of. Smith's effort to prove a Christian communion service in all primitive savagery was worth as much as the doctrine of an immediate and instantaneous revelation of all divine things to a newly created first man.²

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, p. 406.

² See Godbey, "Blood; Marriage Contracts," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, Nashville, July, 1923, and "Blood: The Cult of the Dead," *ibid.*, October, 1923.

The attacks of Old Testament prophets upon the use of incense upon the high places or on the roofs and in the streets and gateways of a city have been hard for some scholars to reconcile with the prescriptions for its use in the temple. But such difficulty has sprung from an unwillingness to admit that such worship was but the continuation of pre-Yahwist pagan customs. These customs had their roots in the experiences of groping humanity, probably more than a million years ago, in the belief of modern paleontologists.

I once heard Professor George Foot Moore observe, with reference to the fish liver thrown on the coals in the Book of Tobit, "The theory was: to make such a stink that the devil himself could not stand it." Morier in *Hajji Baba* (chap. xi) tells of the same use of burnt liver by charlatans in Persia today, the efficiency of the odor or ashes depending upon the importance of the animal. The procedure links itself directly with Jeremiah's complaint that certain famous fumigations were for the express purpose of provoking Yahu to anger (Jer. 7:18)—against the fumigator's enemies, of course. But the result may be to turn a highly "incensed" Yahu loose upon themselves, says Jeremiah—a possibility feared in Exod. 19:22, 24. A similar disappointment is recorded in Acts 19:13 ff. The ceremonial rousing of Yahu to a fury is prominent in Deuteronomy and Kings passages. Ezek. 8:3 has an image in one temple gate for such ritual usages. The leaden and limestone *tabellae devotionis* recovered in such large numbers in recent years put this popular infuriation of gods vividly before us. The Malay who under the influence of narcotics goes wild and "runs amuck" thinks his god can be fired and turned loose by similar practices. Such is the underlying psychology of all "black art," or maliciously intended witchcraft. Per contra, other objects are known to produce torpor, coma, or benignancy. And this is reflected in the term *rēah nihoah*, "absolutely quieting odor" "odor of sweet savor" [A.V.], fifty-three times repeated in Levitical rituals. It is not probable that any scholar in comparative religion will contend that either the psychology or the science and method in these priest-approved rituals for keeping Yahu "absolutely quiet" is fundamentally different from the psychology and methods of the rituals of malicious magic. Intellectually they are equally stupid; ethically they are upon the

same plane. Efforts to twist a marvelous symbolism out of them have not added to the progress of humanity.

One reason for the war of the Hebrew prophets upon the incense rituals of their time would be clearer to any person who would study the methods of modern *séance*-rooms. Much incense is a tradition of the profession, especially with those who make a business of "developing" mediumistic or clairvoyant powers in their disciples. A "trance gift" or power of "spirit vision" is sure to be discovered in those sensitive to a little narcotic stimulation. The mutterings of a half-stupefied disciple in a "pipe dream" are explained to others as "trance manifestation" or "spirit control." All alienists know that even mild odors may stimulate neurotic subjects to imaginative visions, as in the case of Mohammed. A whole roomful—a "school of the prophets" of today—may thus be set gibbering. Some mediums, making a business of furnishing spirits upon demand, willy-nilly, have been known to make themselves complete "dope wrecks." Such practices are known in all lands; observers report them from almost every savage tribe; they figure in a host of orgies and religious frenzies. The reader of the *Arabian Nights* may recall that in some tales spirits of *jann* arise in the smoke of powders thrown on the fire. Lane (I, 61), in his discussion of Arab magic, says that "illusions or hallucinations are still produced by such devices." From ancient Babylonia to the present they are a favorite resort of those who pretend to summon the spirits of the dead. Isa. 57:9 declares:

You have gone (so you say) to the King with ointments;
You have greatly multiplied your odors.
You have sent your messengers to Far-Land.
You have descended even to Sheol!

Similarly, Plutarch¹ tells us that the Egyptians pictured the underworld of the dead as clouded with incense. And powdered *ambārā* is thrown on braziers by modern Turkish necromancers to secure necromantic visions.² Lane reports that intelligent Moslems declare that all *es-semiyah* or deceptive magic is merely a matter of narcotic odors and drugs.³ Dr. Alderson was offered by an Egyptian conjuror a pre-

¹ *De Iside* 80-81.

² "Popular Superstitions of the Turks," *Belgravia Magazine*, 1878.

³ *Manners and Customs of the Egyptians*, I, 360.

scription of sulphur, antimony, and herbs that would cause the person using it to be haunted by specters.¹

Such practices meant immeasurable degradation in character and worship. A narcotic-crazed fool might reel through the streets crying, "Hear the word of Yahu! I have dreamed! I have dreamed! I have dreamed!" (see Jer. 23:25 ff.). Brown reminds us that the incense used in the worship of the Paphian Venus and Syrian Astarte soothed the votary upon his temple couch and filled him with visions of granted desires. So in ancient Babylon, in the liturgy and prayer for the recovery of Shamash-shum-ukin, a censor for the god of dreams was to stand at the head of the bed during the night. In the R. F. Harper *Letters*, No. 450, are directions for the cure of the prince, Ashur-mukin-palêia. After a prayer to Sin, "thou shalt place at the head of the bed a censor of cypress, to cause the god of dreams to remember him." Or the Tarahumare Indian of Mexico today will chew a bit of the Hikulî cactus, and pray the Hikulî god for a favorable dream, just as the Arab does still, and as Israelite and Babylonian seer did four thousand years ago. As for the effects of such gods, it should be observed that anyone who is made to see snakes will inquire of snakes: "practice divination [*nahash* = "snake"]" (A.V.). Bronze snakes have been recovered from ancient fumigation (?) pits in Palestine.

Eternally infamous are the narcotic frenzies that have been deemed the supremest religious exaltation. Under their influence there have been the self-mutilations of delirious enthusiasts, and murders and massacres by frenzied fanatics. We owe the word "assassin" (*hashîshîn*) to *hashîsh*-maddened Syrian zealots. Brown tells us that the *hashîsh* or *khoshkhosh* which certain dervish orders still use until driven to madness consists of powdered poppy leaves.² "*Hashîsh* is still the Master Seyyid." "It is the parrot of all mysteries"; and "opium is the healer of every ill save the one itself creates," said the Arabs to Khan.³ Narcotics are still dominant in Arab medicine, says Zwemer.⁴ Dervishes in their narcotic frenzies frequently personate animals, writes Broadby, bringing the whole subject of lycanthropy and the

¹ "Natural Ghosts," *All the Year Round* (1869).

² *The Dervishes*, pp. 308 ff.

³ *With the Pilgrims to Mecca*, pp. 281 ff.

⁴ *Arabia*, p. 282.

belief in animal possession before us.¹ The smoking of chopped hemp-tops, called *kiff*, is the orgiastic agent. The Aïssawa depend upon it entirely for the famous frenzies of their order, until memory and reason are wrecked, writes La Martinière.² The curious spectator does not know that he is watching men who had shortly before been properly "doped" for the performance. The same resort is known among nomad Beduin.³ Livingstone records the semi-delirium that negroes produce by smoking *mtokwane*, and their simulation of prophetic frenzies, and the use of the same fumigants to induce the heavens to drop their rain, or evil spirits to leave the sick.⁴ Lane observes that oriental nerves seem far more sensitive to all such influences than those of North Europeans.

It should be clear that reformer prophets in their war upon incense to various gods were not simply championing a theoretical monotheism. They were leading the same battle against narcotizations and impostures that we still have to wage. The problem of more intelligent religious leaders in all ages has not been to find acceptable incense, but how to get rid of it. Mahayana Buddhism attempted the same reform in China, requiring that those who contemplated the ascetic and contemplative life should vow abstinence from strong drink, from all perfumes, and chanting, and dancing. These orgiastic methods were put on a par with murder, falsehood, theft, and adultery.⁵ Zarathustra, near Jeremiah's time, was protesting without avail against the ancient Aryan intoxicant *haoma* or *soma*. The Sanskrit literature makes this religious narcotic all but omnipotent, and invokes it as a god, a great warrior conquering all enemies of man, a cure for every ill.⁶ Among the Iranic peoples this *haoma* seems to have been *bharg*, or Indian hemp, for Herodotus (iv. 75) tells us that the Iranic Scythians, who broke into Asia Minor in Jeremiah's time, burned Indian hemp in their religious exercises, until bystanders were intoxicated with their fumes. In India the *soma* was the juice of a certain milkweed in some districts, but others insist that the bruised green leaves of hemp provide the orthodox *soma*. Mohammed,

¹ *Tunis, Past and Present*.

² *Morocco*, pp. 349 f., 396.

³ Hesse-Wartegg, *Tunis*, p. 346; Vivian, *Tunisia*, pp. 84 f.; Doughty, II, 149.

⁴ *Travels and Researches in South Africa*, pp. 579, 588, 101, 24, 213.

⁵ De Groot, *Religion of the Chinese*, p. 170.

⁶ *Sacred Books of the East*, XXIII, 158, 239.

familiar with all the Arab abuses above cited, grouped all with alcohol as *hamr*, and prohibited them. The Western tourist observes Moslem objection to tobacco without recognizing that it is but one detail of a whole field.

As to the antiquity and genesis of such practices, it is to be recognized, in contrast with Robertson Smith's speculations, that they began when the primeval savage discovered that the smoke of his cavern fire sometimes produced queer physiological effects. First reverencing these moods of his fire, he was not long in discovering that they were manifested only when certain weeds or sticks were included in his stock of fuel. After finding out which ones were responsible, he took to praying to these kind gods for more beautiful visions of the unseen world, or for more fervid inspiration. So the savage still does. Early American explorers have recorded observing Indians accidentally brush against a known noxious plant, and immediately pray to it not to punish them or be angry with them. The exact limitations of its powers and methods for mischief had not yet been determined. So one group of "animate and divine plants," in Smith's phrase, results from the most primitive empiricism, because of purely objective or concrete experiences, with no trace of anything mystical or symbolical about them. Similarly, some plutocrat of paleolithic days, having one day gathered more berries than he could eat, stored the rest in a convenient container. Returning a few days later, he devoured the fermented mass, and speedily saw things of whose existence he had not known. So alcohol, the Assembler of Spirits, was promptly enthroned as one of religion's greatest gods, and still resists the efforts of religion and science to oust him.¹ Narcotics of every kind are far earlier in human experience than bread. There is not a people known to the anthropologist that does not possess the knowledge of one or more narcotics, and habitually use them for their omnipotence in inspiration and revelation. The notion of a mysterious blessing lurking in a bunch of grapes is voiced in Isa. 65:8, and a *mishteh* or "drinking"—a big "drunk"—is the term for a religious festival in many Old Testament passages.

¹ Originally the Arabic *al-kohl* was eye-paint or *stibium*, used for emphasizing the eyebrows, etc., and was supposed to contain the spirit or essence of the materials employed. The use of the term was eventually extended to include the supposed essences or spirits of many things.

Again, humanity's experiences were due in part to the nature of its dwellings. Caverns, holes in the ground, tents and wigwams, or straw or reed shelters without flue, incessantly emphasized and added to his manifold experiences with fumigations. Underground dwellings are still common in Central Armenia, in Northern Asia Minor, in part of Turkestan, in the Gharian of Tripoli, in the Matmata Plateau of southern Tunisia, in Georgia, and in many other parts of the world. It is not necessary to add pages of details. The immediate point is that a large portion of humanity has not yet hit upon the idea of a pipe, and when the powers of incense are desired, men resort to the primitive chimneyless hole or hut with the proper material to throw upon the fire. The Turkoman nomad smokes more economically by putting coals at the bottom of a tiny pit, dropping down some tobacco, and then taking a few sniffs at the top of the hole. But midway between such method and the pipe is the portable bowl or saucer for coals, upon which the proper fumigant can be sprinkled. Ezek. 8:11 shows us seventy official fumigators assembled in the temple-room known as the "chamber of imaginations."

This has been an introductory statement of some anthropological fundamentals concerning the use of narcotics as spirit-summoning incenses. The accumulated data concerning hundreds of plants so used would fill a volume. We pass at once to the use of such in ordeals. For it lies upon the surface that any used in general for the summoning or dismissing gods or spirits may also be used for the specific purpose of securing or announcing their approval or condemnation of any person. In the Old Testament there are records of challenges to risk the judgment of the gods. There are also records of some of the ordeal methods.

In Gen. 16:5, Sarah, jealous and angry, challenges Abraham to meet the judgment of Yahu, but Abraham surrenders. Laban challenges Jacob by the *elohîm* (Manes) of the two grandfathers, while Jacob slaughters a victim (for the familiar *berith*-cutting cf. Genesis, chap. 15; Jer. 34:8 ff.). Jephthah challenges Ammon to settle the issue by the judgment of Yahu (Judg. 11:27 f.); the mode of securing a verdict is not suggested. David spares Saul, and challenges him to meet the judgment of Yahu (I Sam. 24:11, 15). Again the mode is not stated, but Saul surrenders, for it at least involves ban and ex-

communication in the second case; "outlawed before men by Yahu, for they have made me such" (I Sam. 26:19 ff.); and again Saul fears to meet the ordeal. One of the most generally practiced Semitic ordeals is that by fire: passing through the fire, or licking or handling heated objects.¹

We may pass at once to the ordeal in the case of jealousy, in Numbers, chapter 5. Here the narcotic agent has been dropped; sanctuary dust in a little holy water from a bowl probably inscribed with the curse formula is supposed to do the work. But it is specifically called the "bitter water that produces curses" in verses 18, 24, 27, and in the last two the text has certainly been tampered with. Bitterness is not producible by mere dust from the floor. The original text must have been the "bitter water which *la^canah* produces"; *la^canah* being either "cursing" or "wormwood." As to the revised ordeal, every anthropologist knows that an unscrupulous administrator could put into the potion any poison he chose or was paid for. The expected results, "prolapsedus or miscarriage if thy womb be teeming," point to the agents still used for such purposes.

An identical ordeal is found in the old pre-Aryan customs collected in the Atharva-Veda. Whether introduced by Semites who had trading-stations in South India as early as 1000 B.C. might interest some investigator. If the Phoenicians really came from the lower Persian Gulf as early as 2700 B.C., as their traditions claim, they had been in India that early. But the parallel ordeal in the cuneiform should be considered here. Pinches published it as a "Babylonian Wedding Ceremony."² Zimmern rightly recognized that there is none in the remaining fragment.³

"All ye, all evil spirits, all wicked spirits, that have seized NN, son of NN
And have persistently pursued him; if thou art male, here is thy wife;
If thou art female, here is thy husband!"

In the morning shalt thou place seven altars before Ea, Shamash, Marduk,
Thou shalt place seven censers of cypress [or yew: very poisonous]; offer
seven lambs,

Shalt offer the right [shoulder], *hinsa*-flesh, *šume*-flesh, pour sesame-wine.
Those images shalt thou place seven ells in front of the offering.

¹ See Morgenstern, "Trial by Ordeal among the Semites," *Hebrew Union College Jubilee Volume*, pp. 113 ff.

² *B. and O. Record*, I, 145.

³ A part of col. VI, *BKBR*, p. 160.

Thou shalt veil them with a linen cloth.
 The man and his wife thou shalt place by their side.
 The girdle of each other they shall [seize].
 Thou shalt pour out the drink of the dead [*kišpu*] unto them.
 Before the offering shalt thou stand, and shalt say,
 [*Šiptu*] "O Ea, Shamash, Marduk, ye gods—
 Judges of all above and below,
 To bring the dead to life, to loose the bound, belongs to you!
 In order that whatever evil spirit hath seized this man,
 Whether evil god or evil prowling demon,
 Whether an inciter of 'evil head,'
 Whether hand of god or. . . ."

The formula is plain. Evil spirits are believed to be striving to separate the man and wife—wishing one or the other as a mate. In Numbers, chapter 5, a jealous spirit has seized the man. In the Book of Tobit, a jealous spirit stands guard over the woman, slaying all men who would possess her. But the Akkadian ceremony requires both man and woman, accuser and accused to undergo the ordeal—a practical precaution not usual in such charges. The obsessing spirits are notified that the desired husband or wife is about to be sent to them. Seizing by the girdle is a solemn devotion to death, found in Xenophon's *Anabasis* in the case of the traitor detected in the army of Cyrus, the Persian nobles in turn thus seizing him. So the man and wife are made ceremonially to devote each other, then the officiating priest pours out for them the drink of the dead (*kišpu*). Compare "The gods, the evil wind-puffs, have come forth from the grave, to demand *kišpi* and libations of water."¹ Similarly, a *kišpu* is poured out for evil and hungry ghosts who are haunting a house.²

As for the plants used in such ordeals, the four narcotics most widely used in rituals are wormwood, poppy, tobacco, and bhang, or *cannabis Indica*. More exactly, the genus *Artemisia* comprises over two hundred species, distributed through all lands, from Arctic to tropical. Wormwood is the popular name of more than one of the commoner species. The genus bears the name of *Artemis*, because so commonly used in the evil craft of Artemis-Hecate. The Hebrew name of wormwood is the same as the Arabic name of one species; the Arabic root means "to curse." The plant is the "cursing weed."

¹ Thompson, *DES*, p. 130.

² No. 52, *BKBR*, pp. 165-67.

A few fundamental facts about the genus are necessary. Similar qualities are in all; some species are relatively mild.

The most dangerous species was called *apsinthos*, "undrinkable," by the Greeks. The French learned its use from North Africans in Algeria (1844-47). It proved so terrible a curse that the French government had to prohibit the further manufacture of absinthe. In French medicine it is of use as a tonic, antacid, antiseptic, febrifuge, vermifuge, emmenagogue, and stimulant. Its temporary exhilaration lasts longer than that of alcohol. Used habitually in small doses, it results in hyperalgesis, especially of the lower limbs; sensory paralysis, trembling, loss of vision and memory, terrifying hallucinations, irritability, hopeless melancholy, or despondency. In large doses it produces convulsions, reeling idiocy, miscarriage, prolapsus, even rupture of the womb; the convulsed victim may rend or tear herself. There is vertigo, fearful optical and auricular illusions (demons, specters), then death.¹ Its possibilities in ordeals then are before us. The manipulator may give a dose producing exaltation, "divine joy," the approval of the gods; or he may consign the victim to a convulsive, agonized, specter-haunted death, as the ordeals in Numbers, chapter 5, and the foregoing Akkadian liturgy suggest.

Ethiopians know its exhilarating properties, and employ it at wedding festivities,² and its employment by exaltation-seeking seers underlies a passage of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." The Greek physician, Aretaeus of Cappadocia, A.D. 100-150, knew of its use throughout the Orient, and prescribes it for melancholy. Apuleius knew that it was useful in driving away demons, and recommends either swallowing it or fumigating with it. The latter course is the one customary in modern Egypt.³ Since the same weed may appear in a maceration, infusion, tincture, or fumigations, it again appears that incense, libations, and ordeals are not fundamentally separable. Wormwood is associated with St. John's Day, and the midsummer St. John's fires in folk custom all over Europe. It will prevent madness, epilepsy, melancholy, or death during the year; it also improves vision—with

¹ Pammel, *Manual of Poisonous Plants*, pp. 756, 790-94; *Nouveau Larousse illustré*, I, 29 f.; *New International Encyclopaedia*, I, 44; Mew and Ashton, *Drinks of the World*; *La grande encyclopédie* I, 149, 153; III, 118.

² Bent, *Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, pp. 34, 170.

³ Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

some this means it will cure sore eyes.¹ The improved vision is certainly a reminiscence of ancient uses for hallucinatory purposes. In Sicily and parts of Italy it is "St. John's charm," or "St. John's magic," and slips of it are thrust into earth or water on St. John's Eve to draw love omens from its behavior. It will also improve defective vision. The scholar recognizes reminiscences of the pot-herb gardens of Adonis or Tammuz. Leland reports that the name Artemis survives among some Tuscan peasantry, and is explained as that of an evil witch-spirit who sucks the blood of the dead.² The wormwood witch of the dead is a Diana-Hecate, says Preller. Wormwood is also called "devil-chaser" in some parts of Italy. The French call it "holy herb," and "herb of St. John," and credit it with magical properties when gathered upon St. John's Eve. A girdle of it will protect against ghosts, headaches, misfortune, and eye diseases; to look at the holy mid-summer St. John's fire through a wreath of it will improve the vision.³ We can trace this marvel-vision folk lore to *Artemisia pauciflora*, or *Santonion*, especially favored by the Santones of Gaul; it has passed into modern medicine with their name, its active principle being Santonin. One grain has killed a child. In addition to the usual vertigo, dizziness, convulsions, powerful heart depression, it has the unique effect of chromatopsia. Small doses make all objects appear brilliantly and variously colored. This made it popular in the ancient Santones' ceremonies. Marcellus reports the same popular use of it, again recalling the ancient festal hallucinations associated with the Baal-Tammuz orgies. Culpepper's medical folk lore, cited above, declares that wormwood is antipathetic to Venus, and sacred to Mars; that it banishes diseases caused by the moon, or from parts of the body dominated by the moon—which is another reminiscence of Artemis-Hecate. The Etruscans have the same notions about wormwood as the French peasantry, including the improvement of vision, but invoke Santa Lucia when using it. But Santa Lucia is recognized as the Christian modification of Losna, the ancient Etruscan sun-god.⁴ The Greek identification of the wormwood patroness with Artemis, whose

¹ Black, *Folk Medicine*, pp. 91, 194, 201; Culpepper, *The English Physician*, pp. 266 f.

² Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 210; Leland, *Etruscan Roman Remains*, p. 162; Blanchard, *Nature's Garden*, p. 316.

³ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, II (1890), 287.

⁴ Or moon-god? See Leland, *op. cit.*, pp. 284 f.

festival was in the spring, suggests the Babylonian month Aiaru, Iyyar, the time of Istar's return. The Greek associations, then, point to original Astarte connections. But in the Babylonian ordeal fragment cited, Shamash, Ea, and Marduk are invoked.

In Arabia, no extensive collection of its lore has been made, but Palgrave reports the use of some narcotic plant in South and Central Arabia, whose effects were like those of nitrous oxide. But after the mad antics of the delirious eater, he has no recollection of them. Bury, who saw the same practice, reports the herb as *shuhr esh-shahed*, "herb of witness," and that it is placed under the head of the dead at burial. He also saw it worn hung upon the neck by dervishes and fakirs. Keane saw the same custom of santons or devotees, and reports it as "an absynthian plant."¹ As Mohammed did not invent this santon use of *Artemisia*, we seem to have some very old Semitic-Sumerian institution before us. With the exhilarating powers of *Artemisia*, and the custom of wearing it upon the neck, and pillowing the dead in their graves with it, compare line 67 in No. 12 of King's *Prayers of the Lifting of the Hand*: "Let nothing restrain the plant of divine joy [*AN. HUL*] that is placed about my neck." King translates "god of joy"; this great body of wormwood-exhilaration lore he does not notice. Since this *AN. HUL* occurs three times in the opening ceremony, King concludes that it must be a title of Marduk, not suspecting the connection of a mysterious plant of "divine joy" with the cult of the sun-god, as we have seen in the St. John's lore of Europe. In the appendix ritual, "divine joy plants" (*šammu AN. HUL. MIŠ*) with two other plants are put in oil of cypress, placed in a *TI. ŠAR*, and rubbed on the sick man's body.

Do this three times. The incantation to Marduk repeat. Those jewels with the divine joy plants present before the god, and speak thus: "Do thou, O Divine Joy, guardian of the health of Ea and Marduk, defender against sorcery and mighty [poisonous] spells, extolled by god and goddess and mankind [breaks] render the guardian *šedu*, and *lamassu* of the temple propitious: reconcile my angry god and goddess and mankind: let them speak truly unto me in the protection of health [—] and all [—] may I be seen, by the command of Marduk the arbiter of the great gods: the god Marduk."

¹ Keane, *Six Months in Mecca*, p. 120; G. W. Bury (Abdullah Mansur), *The Land of Uz*, pp. 270, 272 f.

The petitioner seems profoundly melancholy: everyone is against him, and Marduk is invoked as a judge. Then:

Do the following [instructions to priests]: to the god thou shalt declare [dedicate?] the divine joy plants. Thou shalt place them upon his [the patient's] neck: in the midst of the anointing oil [olive?] and oil of *urkarinnu* tree place: a powerful removal incantation three times repeat, continuously weeping. "This day, O cleansing bowl, O censer, do thou bring him [———] may no scorching sky [simoom?], no weakness, no evil come near him: his name do thou remember graciously."

An old invocation of the divine joy plant is here connected with Marduk. In earlier times it may have been combined with an appeal to some other god.

With the ritual of wormwood in Babylonia compare the boast of Assyrian monarchs that they sprinkled the poison of death upon all lands. Such ceremony was certainly a commonplace war magic with them, to be remembered when considering the like recurrent phraseology in the Old Testament. As for abundance of wormwood, Apollonius of Tyana was offered by the satrap at the Babylonian frontier provisions for his journey, including the best vegetables the Tigris gardens afforded, because toward Babylon the land was so full of *absinthe* that all other herbs were made disagreeably bitter.¹

Some wormwoods are almost the only fuel on the plains of North Syria, as upon our western plains, where they are called "sagebrush." The Arabs like the aromatic odors of their burning. Wilderness wanderers from time immemorial have thus had clinical experience of their qualities. Doughty reports that the gums of milder wormwoods are put in milk, in curds, and *mereesy* (beer) by the Beduwy for their stimulating or cordial properties and their flavor. Burckhardt observed the same fact. The stimulating dose may be made very strong. Camels and goats eat the plants, and the milk is often made bitter because of this. Merrill mentions that the goats eat some shrub in such quantities that anyone who drinks the milk is made giddy by it.² Post's theory that the Jews could have had no clinical experience with wormwood, and were only prejudiced against it by its bitter taste,

¹ Apollonius i. 21.

² Burton, *Unexplored Syria*, I, 214; II, 43, 194; Doughty, *Arabia Deserta*, I, 379; II, 280; Burckhardt, *Bedouins and Wahabys*, I, 224, 240; Musil, *Arabia Petraea*, III, 142; Merrill, *East of the Jordan*, p. 144.

proves unacquaintance with the immense body of evidence of humanity's inevitable clinical experiences in all the immemorial past.¹ Emily of Wazan reports that in Algeria the flesh of sheep that have fed upon it is regarded as peculiarly well flavored. Large quantities of the fat so flavored can be eaten without injury.²

Consider next the place of wormwood in rabbinical legends. The angel of death is Sammael, explained as "Poison of God." He ends life by the infusion of a drop of gall or wormwood into one's drink. The Talmudists identify him with Satan, the "accuser" or "prosecutor" of the Old Testament. Thus the Talmudic lore is based upon an accuser who compels the accused to come to trial and drink wormwood.³ Compare the star wormwood (Rev. 8:11) making waters deadly as well as bitter.

But this "accusing, wormwood-dealing, poison-of-god" angel of death in the Talmudic lore is the *AN. HUL* plant of the foregoing King texts; the *Ū-AN*, when written in Akkadian, is *šammu ilu*. To the cuneiform scholar it is submitted without further discussion that the rabbinic Sammael is simply this familiar *šammu ilu* of cuneiform magic and sorcery. That the cuneiform *šammu* has passed into the Old Testament liturgy as the *sam* of priestly incense is acknowledged by the lexicographers. It thus occurs in fourteen Levitical passages, and in II Chron. 2:3; 13:11; cf. Sir. 49:1; 38:4. So the *sam* of priestly incense mummary becomes the poison of the rabbins. This fact probably preserves a reminiscence of a rabbinical war upon the whole institution of priest-manipulated ordeals. Jastrow recognizes poisonous draughts as playing a large part in the witchcraft of Babylonia.⁴

The actual ordeal seems portrayed in ancient Euphratean art. There is a familiar seal of Gimil-Sin⁵ in which a shaven-headed suppliant is led by a priest or priestess in official attire to a seated god or judge, who is holding out to the suppliant an elegant narrow-necked, two-handled vase. Ezekiel pictures faithless whorish Jerusalem sentenced to drink of Samaria's cup; thus he completes the scene the seal portrays:

¹ Hastings, *DB*, IV, 940.

² Wazan, *My Life Story*, p. 44.

³ *JQR*, VI, 325; Baring-Gould, *Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 16 f., 47 f., 74, 188, 224, 310 ff.

⁴ *RBA*, p. 285.

⁵ Ward, *Cylinder Seals of Western Asia*, No. 304.

You have gone the same way as your sister,
 So I will hand her cup over to you.
 You shall drink of your sister's cup,
 Which is deep and large.
 You shall be jeered and scorned and derided,
 For it is full to the brim.
 You shall be filled with reeling and agony,
 For a cup of horror and terror
 Is the cup of your sister, Samaria.
 You shall drink it, you shall suck it out,
 You shall suck out the very dregs—
 Then your breasts you shall tear off!
 For I have spoken it!!
 Oracle of the Lord Yahu!

Such phraseology pictured to the popular mind a familiar judicial scene from real life. Hab. 2:15 repeats the scene, the *lex talionis* principle being invoked.

Woe unto him who makes his neighbors drink the goblet of his poison
 And makes them to reel, to gloat over their shame!
 Drink now yourself and reel!
 The cup in the right hand of Yahu shall come round to you!
 You shall be gluttoned with shame instead of horror!

Similarly, Edom's unjustified ruthlessness toward her neighbors calls for the *lex talionis*, even as a false ordeal-sentence recoils upon the vindictive prosecutor.

"Here is the sentence of Yahu: If those who were not sentenced to drink the cup still were forced to drink it—and you are he [that made them do it]—shall you be acquitted? You shall not be acquitted: so you shall certainly drink the cup!" (See Jer. 49:12.)

Then in Jer. 25:15–30 is the like picture sentencing many nations:

Thus says Yahu, God of Israel, to me, Take from my hand this wine-cup of poison, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. And when they drink it they will reel and behave like madmen, because of the sword which I am sending among them. . . . Drink till you stagger and vomit and fall to rise no more, because of the sword I am sending among you. . . . Drink you shall!

Similarly, the Babylonian ordeal-cup pictured upon the seals is handed back to Bablyon in Jer. 51:6 ff.:

For this is a time of the vengeance of Yahu.
 Just retribution he is rendering her.

Babylon [claimed to be] a cup of gold in the hand of Yahu,
 That made all lands to reel.
 Of her wine the nations drank
 So that the peoples went mad.
 Suddenly Babylon falls and is convulsion-rent!
 Wail over her—get balsam for her wounds—perhaps she can be cured?
 We would like to cure Babylon,
 But she cannot be cured!
 Leave her there, and let us all go home!
 For her doom rises to heaven,
 And touches the very skies.

So Jer. 8:14 exclaims, "Our God has sentenced us to perish, and given us the juice of poison to drink, because we have sinned against Yahu." And Isaiah of Babylon uses directly the figure of the poor faithless wife, convicted by the ordeal cup, and forsaken even by her children, yet taken back by her pitying husband:

Rouse—rouse—stand up, O Jerusalem,
 That hath drunk from the hand of Yahu
 The cup of his poison [fury]!
 The very dregs of the cup of reeling
 Thou hast drunk, thou has sucked out.
 [But there's none to guide her, of all the sons she has borne!
 None to clasp her hand, of all the children she has reared!]

 Poor tortured one, reeling, but not with wine,
 Listen to this now:
 Thus saith your lord [husband], Yahu, thy God,
 Who will plead the cause of his people,
 I am taking from thy hand the cup of reeling,
 The dregs of the cup of my poison [fury].
 Thou shalt not longer continue drinking it.
 I hand it now to thy torturers¹
 That said to thee, Prostrate thyself and let us pass over,
 For thou hast laid thy body like the earth,
 Like a road for those tramping over.

Other passages need not be detailed. "The wine of reeling" (Ps. 60:2), "Cup of trembling" (Zech. 12:2; Obad. 1:6), "cup in the hand of Yahu" (Ps. 75:8), show the familiar character of this hideous ordeal custom. Is it involved in all expressions of "pouring out wrath" or

¹ The same verb in Lam. 1:4, 5, 12; 3:32, 33; Job 19:2; Ps. 13:2. Is a similar institution in mind?

poison?¹ The rhetorical figure does not occur in the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The wormwood-cup ordeal seems peculiar to the days of Babylonian influence, while the fumigant method is the one surviving in the Levitical incense prescriptions. But, as already suggested, the wormwood ordeal must have been original in Numbers, chapter 5, and have been edited out by the more human sentiment of later compilers. For it is emphasized that it is a "bitter water" that the priest administers. "Cup of deliverance" in Ps. 116:13 suggests vindication, acquittal.

Rōsh, "gall or poison," and *la'anah*, "wormwood," occur in a few prophetic passages concerning the process of judgment, e.g., Amos 6:12, "Ye change judgment to poison, and the fruit of righteousness to wormwood" (cf. 5:7; Hos. 10:4). So "feed me with wormwood, give me poison" (Jer. 9:15; 23:15; cf. Deut. 29:18; 32:32). As for the use of "wine" in these ordeal passages, Kūchler's *Assyrische Medizin* shows that a large proportion of the herbal remedies were steeped or boiled in some sort of "wine," which was then given to the patient. "The wine of the poison of asps, or venom of dragons," in Deut. 32:24, 33; Job 20:14, 16; Ps. 58:4; Ps. 140:3, must be taken literally. Such Macbeth witch-messes are in use today as in medieval Europe. A negro woman-voodooist was lynched in Arkansas some years ago for poisoning her employer, snakes' heads in his coffee being part of the mess. Similar stews of snake and scorpion are to be had today in Palestine; the local idea now is that such messes are prophylactics against bites and stings.² As for the "gall" of Matt. 27:34, the Gospel of Peter reverses popular modern exegesis, and says that the gall was given Jesus to hasten his end, that he might die before sundown. He surely knew such practice. Was the convulsive poison expected to rupture the heart?

It is not necessary to review the many commentators who have argued that such practices in Palestine were impossible, and that the cup-of-poison language is purely figurative. Effective rhetorical figures must employ facts. The entire lack of knowledge of the anthro-

¹ Consider Ps. 69:21, 24; 73:10; 79:6; Jer. 6:11; 10:25; Ezek. 7:8; 14:19; 20:8, 13, 21, 33, 34; 21:31; 22:22, 31; 30:15; 23:8; 36:18; Job 16:13; 20:21; 30:16; Jer. 7:20; 42:18; 44:6; Lam. 4:11; 2:6; Hos. 5:10; Isa. 42:25; II Chron. 12:7; 34:21, 25; cf. Rev. 14:10; 16:2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12.

² Van Lennep, *Bible Lands*, p. 311.

pological environment and immemorial antecedents of the Old Testament phraseology explains such erring expositors. They need not be catalogued. We have seen that the institution considered is world wide and ages upon ages older than the Old Testament.

But we are not done with the subject when we have examined all the passages containing the word "wormwood." In much that we have seen in the Old Testament there may have been no wormwood. For the same terrible volatile poisonous oil is found in four other widely used plants. The narcotic from wormwood is absinthol; but common tansy, so widely used for the same stimulating powers, gives tanacetol; common sage, salviol, and the arbor-vitae gives thujol; and these are identical with absinthol. The oil of American red cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, and of the *Juniperus oxycedrus*, the juniper or cedar of the Mediterranean region, is a powerful poison also, and nearly identical with that from the other four.¹ No other tree has been so widely used as a dangerous and terrible inebriant. All the widely scattered Semitic peoples are familiar with its use. It is impossible that ancient Palestinians should not have been familiar with it. The cedars of Lebanon were "divine cedars," or "cedars of a god," in Ps. 80:10, and entered into rituals for banishing plague or death, as wormwood did (Lev. 14:4; Num. 19:16). The term "cedar" is very loosely used in the Orient, and the deadly yew is known to be sometimes the cedar of cuneiform building inscriptions.² Similarly, the cypress is sometimes the yew, in popular lore, and the cypress in fumigation is exchangeable for the poisonous yew. That common sage, before its volatile poison is dissipated by drying, yields the deadly salviol suggests that its close kinsman, the hyssop, should be chemically investigated for like possibilities. So here is a large group of plants, small doses of any of which will produce chronic intestinal inflammation, while large doses produce staggering, delirium, hallucinations, convulsions, and sudden death.

Waiving consideration of the uses of tansy and sage in magic and mischievous sorcery, some illustrations of the use of the various cedars are really necessary for the student of biblical lore. The Dainyal sibyl of the Hindoo Koosh tribes inhales the thick, pungent smoke of fire of twigs of the gigantic *deo-dar*, "god-tree" or sacred cedar, "till

¹ Pammel, pp. 330-32.

² Van Lennep, p. 155.

she is seized with convulsions and falls to the ground. Soon she rises, and raises a shrill chant, which is caught up and largely repeated by her worshippers.”¹ Gibbon (IV, 208), citing Zemarchus, tells us that “frankincense” was burned by frenzied “Turkish” shamans to expel evil spirits from the Roman ambassadors. Curtin, who repeatedly had the like experience with Buriat Mongols, etc., tells us that the “frankincense” of Zemarchus is branches of juniper, through whose smoke we have been peeping at Babylonia.² The same fumigating and purifying agency was depended upon by the Druids in their orgies and year-end ceremonies. If plagues appeared among cattle all fires were extinguished, a new “force fire” (by fire-wheel) started, juniper burned with it in the cattle yard, and boiled and sprinkled on the cattle.³ Christianity has stopped our drinking the boiled juniper, but has left us the lighted Christmas tree, while its berries in alcoholic drinks make gin a competitor for absinthe. Juniper was used by the Dacotah Indians in the same prophylactic fumigation methods. It was thought a very great spirit, *wahkun*. The medicine man could inspire himself, in the fashion of the Dainyal Sibyl; or he might enthruse a whole company with its fumes in a closed wigwam. The arbor-vitae they burned to destroy the supernatural powers of any foe. Since the cedar or juniper was never struck by lightning, throwing a piece of it in the fire was sure to drive away a storm. The Iroquois used both the juniper and the white cedar or arbor-vitae; the juniper in the solemn war-council fires, the white cedar at peace councils. The use in ordeals for individuals has not been reported.⁴

It is in use in the same manner, and for the same purposes, to drive away evil spirits, inspire and purify, all over North and Central Asia. It is burned on housetops in Thibet, as it was in ancient Babylonia. Closed-in tents and underground dwellings meant an early acquaintance with its smoke. The abuse is immemorial.⁵ Sherring tells us it is

¹ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, 35.

² *Journey to Southern Siberia*, *passim*.

³ Hazlitt-Brand, *Dictionary of Faiths and Folk-Lore*, I, 10; Gregor, *Folk-Lore of N.E. Scotland*, p. 159; Black, *Folk Medicine*, p. 202.

⁴ Mary Eastman, *Dakota*, p. 210; Grinnell, *The Indian of Today*, p. 23; Morgan, *Ancient Society*, p. 137 n.

⁵ Rockhill, *Land of the Lamas*, pp. 99, 100, 183, 248; Huc, *Travels in Tartary, Thibet, and China*, II, 250; Sarat Chandra Das, *Journey to Lhasa*, pp. 31, 198, 268, 330; Sherring, *Western Thibet*, p. 330.

through no fondness for perfumes; the Mongolians dislike perfumes, and the odor is so offensive to the average Englishman that he will forego its use as wood. Curtin's experiences with it in Mongolian fumigations of strangers we have noticed. The Mexican Indian shaman uses it with equal faithfulness, putting sick folk in vapor baths of juniper, visiting each ranch once a year, kindling fire, piling on green juniper, and gum copal, and driving the animals through the smoke, as we saw Druid and modern Scotch peasantry do; and after a funeral juniper is burned in the house, "to cure it."¹

With this general view, let the Babylonian *baru* speak of juniper or cedar himself.

Šamaš, lord of Judgment! Hadad, lord of vision [clairvoyance]! I offer you incense of cedar! Bundles of sprays of pleasant odor! Bundles of pure cedar, beloved of the great gods! The court of your godship I fill with incense. Be ye filled with odors of cedar! May the great gods be filled with cedar smoke as an offering, in order to judge judgment! Sit ye down! Judge judgment! Let Šamaš and Adad stand by me! In my tears, in the lifting up my hands, in all that I do, may there be correctness!²

As for the tears, the *baru* was sure to weep, if sufficiently smoked, and sure to see gods and spooks appear. It is of first importance that the gods are here summoned for judgment; whether in a matter of political or of personal relations does not matter. We have before us the question: Which was the more primitive practice, fumigating the seer or fumigating the accused? As with Mongols above, Semitic clouds of incense do not result from a liking of the odors.

But this fumigating the seer until he gives decisions by his delirious rantings or stumblings urges the question, Is it not this same narcotic-produced reeling and stumbling of priest and prophet that Isa. 28:7 f. has in view? "Every table is filled with emetics: a filthy thing is every vessel [*keḷî*] of a *makôm*."

Since neither the Babylonian Isaiah nor the Epistle of Jeremy, with their scorn of the idols of Babylon, have left us criticism of the mischievous use of incense, the use of cedar, etc., in their time may have been a mere traditional form, as in Lev. 14:4, 6, 49; Num. 19:6. The poisonous oil of cedar is used in cleansing an Assyrian house, and in compounds.³

¹ Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*, I, 314, 320, 383.

² Zimmern, *BKBR*, p. 193.

³ Thompson, *Semitic Magic*, pp. 187 ff.

Turning to Abyssinia, juniper is there still associated with the dead, and spirits of the dead. In juniper groves on hilltops the ancient pagan sacrifices were held, and there the churches are still built in the cemeteries, and at funerals censers are brought by each householder. The body is halted seven times on the way to the grave and fumigated, while the priests read and pray. Juniper sprays are thrown in on the body in the grave, if one of the aristocracy—never on a smith, who is the incarnation of evil and wizardry. In spite of the juniper, evil spirits can sometimes be heard in the grave carrying off the dead. Parkyns does not say what incense is used. Harris does not know of any use of juniper berries.¹ They are still used in Tyrolese May Day expulsion of witches.

Looking in Palestine, the famous clump of cedars on the top of Lebanon still has a guardian or *wakil*, being an ancient sanctuary, and the nearby villages still hold a "feast of cedars" which more meticulous Christians call "feast of Transfiguration." There is little now but a drunken roystering of both sexes under the ancient "cedar-gods" or "cedars of a god." The actual use of cedar-narcotization in the ancient cult may be safely inferred. Present-day customs are probably but a mild type of the ancient Palestinian *mišteh*, "drinking feast," of Gen. 21:8; 26:30; 29:22; 40:20; Judg. 14:10; I Sam. 25:36; etc.² Rabbinical legends about the cedars are of value as preserving a connection with the foregoing. Cypress, cedar, and pine are three trees that, when grown into one, have power to take away sin. Juniper ashes form the bones of the great fire-angel into which Enoch was transformed. So the pine may be one of the trees whose name still perplexes us in the Babylonian liturgies. Cedar and cypress, which may also be yew, we have seen to be regular in the censers. Since the rabbins name the pine as one of the invincible combination of three,³ the probability is that the stone pine is meant. This tree is of high value as a food-producer in Europe throughout the entire Mediterranean district. Throughout Asia Minor, and in Palestine, it is even more highly esteemed, its sweet seeds entering into

¹ Harris, *Highlands of Ethiopia*, II, 117, 400-401; III, 363; Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, II, 53-54, 59.

² Porter, *Five Years in Damascus*, II, 298; Burton, *Unexplored Syria*, I, 100; Van Lennep, *Bible Lands*, p. 156.

³ Baring-Gould, *Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 90, 177, 376.

a number of favorite dishes, and as fuel it is so highly esteemed that special care is taken to grow it for that purpose. It is regularly associated with the death of the corn-gods Dionusos, Attis, and Osiris, perpetuating an immemorial food supply. Their worshipers were generally drunken in their feasts. Pliny¹ tells that the wine which frenzied Phrygians used in the worship of Cybele was brewed from stone-pine seeds. Wine is so loosely used a word in the East that the legends connecting Osiris and his mother Nit with the origin of "wine" may mean the tree in which she is represented as standing, pouring a libation for the dead.²

It is not necessary to add a list of purely formal or magical uses of these narcotic plants. The Babylonian *baru*, who carried an official staff or wand of cedar, the ancient Sumerian or the modern Arab, or Abyssinian wearing a tuft of wormwood upon the neck and taking it to the grave as a pillow, show us that ancient stage of thought when the eating or fumigating with these plants had shown them to possess terrible powers, and the limitations of their actual exercise of those powers had not been determined. So the primitive savage bore the terrible animate thing about with him as his comrade pledged to protect him against various personal enemies.

¹ *Nat. hist.* xiv. 103.

² Britton, *North American Trees*, p. 4; Burton, *Unexplored Syria*, II, 145; Van Lennep, *Bible Lands*, I, 162; Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, pp. 322 and 340.